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Local Elections and Party Politics in a Post-Conflict Area: The Pilkada in Maluku¹

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Largely unnoticed by both domestic and international observers, Indonesia's former conflict province of Maluku recently held its first-ever direct gubernatorial election (*pemilihan kepala daerah, pilkada*). Given the province's history of violent unrest, the lack of attention paid to the electoral contest was somewhat surprising. After all, between 1999 and 2002 competition for local power was one of the key factors that underpinned the bloody clashes between Christians and Muslims in Maluku. Over the last few years the situation has gradually returned to normal, but in the run-up to the *pilkada* there was growing concern in some quarters that the local election might prompt a renewed mobilisation of long-standing grievances. Yet, the fact that neither the national nor the international media took any substantial notice of the election is an obvious indicator that these fears did not eventuate. Indeed, in stark contrast to the election of the governor in neighbouring North Maluku, where the contest itself as well as the aftermath was marred by high tensions and violent demonstrations, the election in Maluku proceeded in remarkably orderly fashion and the results were generally accepted by all parties involved.

The election gave the winner, the incumbent governor Karel Ralahalu, a strong mandate for another five year term of office. With 62 percent of the vote, he won a resounding victory over his three competitors and in fact achieved one of the best results for any governor in all Indonesian provinces. The decisiveness of his victory, it is hoped, might now pave the way for renewed efforts in reconstruction and reconciliation between the religious communities of the province, although the extent to which Ralahalu will be able to shape Maluku's development in the coming years ultimately depends on the results of the next parliamentary election in 2009. Nonetheless, the *pilkada* was an important political exercise for Maluku and its success should open up new opportunities for a province that is still one of the least developed in Indonesia.

This paper analyses the key events of the 2008 gubernatorial election in Maluku and puts them into the broader context of the province's recent history of post-conflict recovery. It begins with a brief review of the communal conflict that raged in the province between 1999 and 2002 and political developments after the conflict, especially the implications of the rise of Karel Ralahalu to the post of governor in 2003. The in-depth analysis of the 2008 election that follows focuses on the individual candidates and the avenues they chose to secure their nominations, the role of political parties and socio-political mass organisations in the campaign, and the salience of religion and ethnicity

¹ This text is an earlier version of a revised paper that is currently under peer review for publication in South East Asia Research.

during the election. Overall, the paper argues that the main reasons behind Karel Ralahu's remarkable victory were his genuine popularity, his shrewdness in exploiting this popularity and his extraordinary ability to develop a highly diverse network of organizational stakeholders who were willing to support his re-election bid in order to secure ongoing access to power and patronage resources. Moreover, it will highlight that even though Maluku's *pilkada* was characterised by some minor logistical deficiencies,² the very fact that neither the electoral process nor the subsequent announcement of the results triggered a new wave of violence should be regarded as a significant success. Most importantly, all the key players, including those who lost the contest, seem to have accepted the new rules of the game, namely free and direct democratic elections, as the only legitimate means to distribute formal political power. While a final judgment on Maluku's medium- to long-term prospects for political and social stability will only be possible after the legislative election in 2009, it is fair to say that the *pilkada* was a major step on Maluku's path back to normality.

The Conflict and its Aftermath

Maluku rose to tragic prominence in January 1999 when a brawl between youths at a bus terminal in downtown Ambon triggered the beginning of a violent religious conflict. Over a period of about four years, clashes between Christians and Muslims all but tore the province apart.³ At the time, the eruption of violence came as a complete surprise to most observers, but in retrospect it seems clear that Maluku was in many ways ripe for communal conflict. After decades of often poorly managed structural change the province was laden with social time bombs, including a society highly dependent on the state sector for employment, an increasingly fragile religious balance between Christians and Muslims vying for prestigious jobs in the bureaucracy and a very high proportion of young people, many of whom were without work (van Klinken 2007: 90-93). As long as the Suharto regime had been firmly in charge, a tight lid had been kept on all potential trouble spots, but once the dictator had resigned, an explosive cocktail of political uncertainty, social instability and growing perceptions of threat emerged.

Religion was a key ingredient of this cocktail. Of course, commitments to either the Christian or the Islamic faith had always been major sources of social identity in Maluku, but it was only in the later years of the New Order that these commitments had become more and more politicised, especially in the context of increasingly tense competition between the two communities over key posts in the bureaucracy. Now that a new political system was about to be crafted, these politicised religious identities spilled over into electoral politics. Most significantly, political parties – emasculated for decades, but now destined to become the most important vehicles to achieve formal political power – took on a decidedly religious character in Maluku. For example, the Maluku branch of Megawati Sukarnoputri's PDI-P became a bastion of Protestant interests,⁴

² For example, people in a small village in East Seram could not exercise their right to vote until several days after polling day because poor weather conditions had prevented the local KPU from distributing the ballot papers on time.

³ Details of the conflict have been analyzed elaborately elsewhere (Aditjondro 2001, International Crisis Group 2002/2004, van Klinken 2006, Spyer 2002, Toisuta et al. 2007).

⁴ The emergence of PDI-P as an almost exclusively Christian party in Maluku is inextricably linked to the history of party politics in the province. Back in the 1950s, during Indonesia's first experiment with

while on the other side of the religious spectrum a number of distinctly Islamic parties were created. It was against this background of heightened political and social tensions that the violent conflict in Maluku erupted in January 1999.



Reconstruction is under way but the scars of the conflict can still be seen in Ambon.

Triggered by a seemingly trivial altercation between youths from adjacent Christian and Muslim neighbourhoods in Ambon City the violence rapidly spread beyond the confines of the provincial capital. The ferocity of the fighting, the emphasis on religious identities and symbols during the battles and the overall pattern of mobilisation all suggested that this was not just another brawl between rival youth gangs. Rather, as van Klinken (2007) has convincingly argued, this violence carried strong notions of deliberate mobilisation by people with significant political interests. Key actors within the respective religious communities, especially those now actively involved in the newly

parliamentary democracy, a Protestant party called Parkindo had captured the imagination of the Christian community and was, together with its Islamic counterpart Masyumi, the dominant force in provincial politics. During the New Order, the party system was streamlined and Parkindo was forced to merge with other parties into the new Indonesian Democratic Party (*Partai Demokrasi Indonesia*, PDI). However, given the weakness of the other parties that were forced to amalgamate together with Parkindo, PDI in Maluku retained a distinctly Protestant identity. In 1998, this identity was transferred to the new PDI-P which was effectively founded on the organisational remnants of the PDI.

emerging political landscape, apparently regarded the breakdown of social order not only as a threat, but also as an opportunity to (re)assert their authority over local politics (van Klinken 2007: 105). Violence quickly became politics by other means, orchestrated and directed by rationally calculating actors who cared little about the human cost of the fighting.

Whether these actors had indeed intended the bloodshed to turn into the kind of civil war that eventually ensued is of course debatable. Once the fighting was underway, new dynamics developed rapidly, arguably beyond the control of those who had initially mobilised the various combat groups. According to Brown, Wilson and Hadi (2005: 33-36), there were at least three escalating factors that contributed to the protraction of the conflict, namely the involvement of the security forces and external militias, the dubious role of the media in distributing (dis)information, and the growing desire for revenge against the enemy. Largely due to these inauspicious dynamics, the violence dragged on for several years (with various lull periods in between), until in February 2002 mediation efforts in the small town of Malino in South Sulawesi at last resulted in a peace agreement.

The Malino Agreement put an end to the large-scale communal fighting, but sporadic outbreaks of violence continued to threaten the fragile peace. Several targeted bomb attacks as well as a series of sniper killings were among the most serious of these attacks,⁵ and there were also a number of localised fights between neighbouring villages on Ambon Island.⁶ None of these incidents, however, triggered renewed widespread communal conflict, indicating that people from both religious communities were no longer so easily provoked. From 2003 onwards, reconstruction and reconciliation efforts got under way and over the years that followed Maluku gradually returned to normal.

The Right Man at the Right Time in the Right Place?

The person who oversaw this recovery process was Karel Ralahu. A retired military officer with an untarnished reputation, Ralahu rose to the position of governor in August 2003 in a tightly contested indirect election in Maluku's regional parliament. Backed by the Indonesian Democratic Party-Struggle (*Partai Demokrasi Indonesia-Perjuangan*, PDI-P) and sections of the United Development Party (*Partai Persatuan Pembangunan*, PPP), Ralahu and his running mate Muhammad Abdullah (Memet) Latuconsina won a narrow victory of 20:18 votes against their Golkar-supported opponents Zeth Sahuburua and Mohammad Taher Laetupa. Given his paper-thin majority, Ralahu initially seemed rather unlikely to become a powerful governor. But over the next five years, the former brigade-general, who had come to office with little political experience, proved to be remarkably adept on the political stage.

When Ralahu began his first term, Maluku was still a province in shock. Barely a year after the signing of the Malino agreement calm had returned to Ambon and the

⁵ In late April 2004, coinciding with the anniversary of the founding of the Republic of the South Moluccas (*Republik Maluku Selatan*, RMS), Maluku briefly looked destined to return to communal violence when a series of sniper attacks killed 38 people within just a few days (International Crisis Group 2004). Contrary to widespread fears, however, even this incident failed to provoke more widespread new attacks.

⁶ The overall consensus amongst most observers was that these sporadic fights between villages had little to do with the broader conflict as they were mostly rooted in long-standing disputes about village borders and access to land.

surrounding islands, but the political, economic and psychological scars of the conflict were still omnipresent. Moreover, despite the peace deal, religious sentiment and social tensions were still running extremely high. Accordingly, two major themes dominated the political discourse in Maluku at the time of the 2003 election: security (*keamanan*) and balance (*perimbangan*) between the religious groups. Ralahalu and his running mate Memet Latuconsina were well-positioned to address these issues, not only because they represented both of the religious communities – Ralahalu is Protestant and Latuconsina is Muslim – but also because Ralahalu, as a retired military general who had come out of the conflict without being implicated in any of the transgressions committed by the Armed Forces during the fighting,⁷ seemed to symbolize hopes for a better and safer future. In many ways, one may argue, he was the right man in the right place at the right time. And regardless of whether he actually actively contributed to the improving circumstances or not, there can be little doubt that under Ralahalu's leadership Maluku experienced a remarkable return to stability.

Although the restoration of security helped enhance Ralahalu's popularity over the next few years, there was much more to Ralahalu than just the image of a strong military figure able to bring back law and order. Indeed, for many Malukans Ralahalu was a man of the people. When asked about the governor's main characteristics in the run-up to the 2008 election, friends and foes alike almost unanimously described him as modest, friendly and down-to-earth.⁸ Maybe the most obvious indicator of his humble attitude was his willingness to travel extensively around the province and visit even the remotest villages, some of which had never been visited by a provincial government official before. Local journalists who accompanied the governor on these trips reported that people were literally crying when they saw the governor.⁹

In an environment where people take immense personal pride in their home villages, a visit by the governor is significant indeed. And when he spends a few million rupiah on rebuilding the local mosque or church during his visit, it almost ensures an increased vote in the next election. But despite obvious political calculations behind the visits, Ralahalu was also widely regarded as having a genuine interest in the living conditions of the people in his province. Ralahalu began his tours around the province as early as 2004, just about a year after his rise to the post of governor. At this time, the next election was still a long way off and the *pilkada* legislation which would eventually pave the way for direct local elections from 2005 onwards had not even been enacted. Thus, when Ralahalu started to show an interest in communicating with ordinary people he could not yet know for sure that at the end of his five-year term this proximity to the

⁷ It is widely known that sections of the military played a rather dubious role during the conflict. Rather than stopping the violence, members of the armed forces in many ways directly contributed to the perpetuation of the conflict. According to Azca (2006: 432), this 'non-normative behaviour' included deliberate negligence, the provision of support to combatants, the instigation of violence and direct involvement in combat. Ralahalu, however, was never implicated in any of these incidents, even though he was district military commander (*Danrem*) in Ambon at the beginning of the conflict. He was later moved to Papua, where he remained until his retirement in 2002.

⁸ Author's observation from various fieldwork trips in 2008.

⁹ Author's personal communication with local journalists from Maluku, June 2008.

people (what Indonesians like to call *merakyat*) would actually become a valuable asset in his campaign for re-election.¹⁰

As well as making use of existing organisational structures, Ralahalu attempted to establish a range of new networks to boost his prestige. In contrast to his tours around the province, however, these organisational activities from the very beginning indisputably served a political purpose. In fact, many of them were only initiated in 2007, at a time when it was already abundantly clear that he was attempting to widen his institutional networks to enhance his chances for re-election. The most obvious of these moves was his entry into party politics. In April 2007, local PDI-P icon John Mailoa suddenly and unexpectedly passed away, leaving the position of provincial party chairman vacant. Almost instantaneously Ralahalu declared himself ready to take over as caretaker leader, even though he had no organisational track record in the party.¹¹ Just a short time afterwards, in October 2007 the party organised an extraordinary congress and to the disbelief of a number of long-established local PDI-P politicians, Ralahalu was elected new provincial chairman.

By assuming the PDI-P leadership Ralahalu not only signalled which party he wanted to use for his nomination in 2008, but also which wider networks he would like to exploit for his campaign. As is well-known in Ambon and beyond, in Maluku the PDI-P has long maintained very close relations with the province's biggest and best-organised social organisation, the Protestant Church (*Gereja Protestan Maluku*, GPM). Building on historical bonds between the church and the old Protestant party Parkindo in the 1950s, PDI-P leaders in 1998 immediately affiliated the party with the GPM once the restrictions of the New Order were abolished. Indeed, by the time communal conflict broke out in 1999, relations were so close that there were hardly any PDI-P leaders in Maluku that were not also involved in the Protestant Church (van Klinken 2007: 95). While this may no longer be the case, there is no doubt that there are still extensive organisational and individual linkages between PDI-P and the GPM. Ralahalu knew this – not least because his own wife is a minister – and thus he effectively killed two birds with one stone when he became chairman of the party's provincial leadership board.

But Ralahalu was not content with having secured support from PDI-P and, by implication, GPM. Well-aware that Ambon is the only town of any size in the province and that in many villages traditional *adat* leaders (usually called *raja* in Maluku) are the most important political influence on people's lives, Ralahalu sponsored a number of new organisations intended to help him develop closer links with Maluku's hundreds of villages. One such organisation is the so-called *Majelis Latupati*, which was founded in

¹⁰ It should be noted, however, that his political instincts would certainly have told him that direct elections were likely to be imminent for the local level after the presidential election in 2004 was conducted as a direct election for the first time ever.

¹¹ While the official party line seemed to be that Ralahalu had already joined the party as an ordinary member in 2002 (before his nomination for governor in 2003), Ralahalu's critics within the party claimed that he had no party affiliation whatsoever before his candidature for the provincial chairmanship in 2007. Local journalists also had differing opinions on this issue, with some arguing that Ralahalu did join PDI-P in 2002 (some said 2003), while others supported the more critical stance, saying that he was not a party member before 2007. Despite the difference in detail, the bottom line is that Ralahalu did not match the organisational experience of the other contenders for the chairmanship and that this lack of experience did not matter at all, leaving a number of loyal party soldiers who had also set their sights on the chairman post out in the cold. Viewpoints obtained through interviews with Lucky Wattimury, Jopie Papilaya and several local media representatives in June/July 2008.

2007 as an organisation that brings together *adat* leaders from all over Maluku in an open forum. Set up with the support of respected NGO figure Ikhsan Malik, the *Majelis Latupati* was initially conceived as an organisation that would be used to reduce the potential for conflict between villages and to revive traditional *adat* mechanisms of conflict resolution. Soon after its formation, however, the *Majelis Latupati* was virtually captured by Ralahu and his campaign team who saw it as offering a perfect opportunity for the incumbent governor to connect regularly with influential local powerholders and build new patronage lines directly from the provincial down to the village level. Thus, as prominent reconciliation activist and religious leader Abidin Wakano observed, the *Majelis Latupati* quickly degenerated into little less than a 'tool for the powerful'.¹²

In addition to the *Majelis Latupati*, which has a broad reach over Maluku, Ralahu also sponsored the establishment and activities of other, more locally and sometimes ethnically confined *adat* organisations (so-called *paguyuban*). In particular, he focused his attention on the strategically important area of Ambon-Lease which comprises the four main islands of the Ambonese cultural heartland, namely Ambon Island, Haruku, Saparua and Nusalaut.¹³ The special significance of these four islands can be traced back to the days of Dutch colonialism (Chauvel 1990) and was reinforced throughout the New Order when key positions in the military and the bureaucracy were often allocated to members of traditionally powerful families from those four islands. In particular, a small number of villages on Haruku, collectively known as Hatuhaha, became the epicentre of power in Maluku during the New Order. Relatively sparsely populated, Hatuhaha has long punched well above its weight in terms of political and economic power. By contrast, the Leihitu and Salahutu areas on Ambon Island (collectively known as Henahetu) have long had less political influence than Hatuhaha, even though they are more densely populated. With the rise of Karel Ralahu in 2003, however, the balance has begun to shift towards the Henahetu area as Ralahu hails from the village of Alang in the Leihitu sub-district.

When Ralahu ran for governor for the first time in 2003, he had consciously taken a running mate from Hatuhaha in order not to alienate powerful interests from this area. In other words, he endeavoured to guarantee not only a religious but also an ethno-regional balance. For the 2008 election, however, he changed his strategy. Well aware of the evolving electoral dynamics precipitated by the replacement of indirect elections with the *pilkada* regulation, he sought to mobilise support at the grassroots rather than appease the Hatuhaha elites through power sharing at the top. His vehicle of choice to reach out to voters was the local *adat* organisation. Thus, based on the calculation that winning support from traditional local leaders at the grassroots would later translate into broader support at the ballot box, he and his campaign managers systematically approached key *adat* figures from Hatuhaha and offered them better access to patronage resources.¹⁴

A final factor that shaped Ralahu's first term in office and probably impacted positively on his growing popularity was the fact that Maluku experienced an enormous

¹² Author's interview with Abidin Wakano, NGO activist and prominent member of the Indonesian Council of Ulema, (*Majelis Ulema Indonesia*, MUI), 14 July 2008.

¹³ The last three of these are collectively known as the Lease Islands.

¹⁴ Ralahu used the same strategy in Henahetu where he also sponsored a local *paguyuban* to drum up support for his re-election bid. Given that this area is basically his own backyard, his task there was substantially easier from the outset, but the incumbent still left nothing to chance as indicated by the appointment of Ismael Titopela, a close ally of Ralahu, to the chairmanship.

influx of reconstruction funds in the aftermath of the conflict. National and international donors contributed huge amounts of money to Maluku, much of which was administered directly by the provincial government. Most prominently, a special presidential instruction issued in 2003 by then-President Megawati Sukarnoputri (Inpres 6) provided billions of rupiah for reconstruction and reconciliation measures in line with the provisions of the Malino Agreement. Awash with money, Ralahalu easily endeared himself to many segments of society, missing few opportunities to open newly established churches, mosques and community centres.

Dents in the Governor's Crown

While Ralahalu became a well-connected and fairly popular governor, not all that glittered was gold. Ralahalu himself was never implicated in any corruption scandals, but several of his protégés in the bureaucracy did come under anti-corruption scrutiny.¹⁵ The fact that none of these top bureaucrats was ever held accountable for their alleged transgressions invited criticism about Ralahalu's commitment to the rule of law and, more generally, about his selection of personnel. Few positions in the highest layers of the bureaucracy had actually been filled according to merit or competence in 2003. Given the frequently-expressed demand for a power balance (*perimbangan*) between Christians and Muslims after the conflict, religious orientation appeared to be a more important consideration during the staffing of the various government offices. Moreover, patron-client connections determined many personnel decisions as both Ralahalu and his deputy governor were keen to ensure that supporters and friends were rewarded for their loyalty. As a consequence, the capacity of the bureaucracy to deal with the challenges of post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation was severely limited.

This became particularly evident in the debate over the distribution of the reconstruction funds. Even though an enormous number of potential projects warranted government assistance, Ralahalu's bureaucrats failed to commit to enough projects by the time the money from Inpres 6 had to be spent, leading to allegations of misappropriation and corruption. Critics also questioned the government's priorities. NGO activists in particular argued that Ralahalu spent far too much money on physical reconstruction rather than genuine reconciliation between the religious groups. For example, no serious efforts were made to prevent religious segregation in Ambon when internally displaced people returned to the city after the conflict. According to young Muslim intellectual Hasbollah Toisuta, religious segregation poses the single biggest long-term threat to Maluku's recovery, mainly because it does not only happen in a physical sense, but because it also pervades people's minds.¹⁶

In sum, by the time the 2008 election drew closer the reconstruction of post-conflict Maluku was well under way, but under the surface social tensions and political problems continued to simmer. While most local observers agreed that another eruption

¹⁵ The heads of at least three provincial government departments (Health, Social Affairs and Information and Communication) were implicated in corruption scandals during Ralahalu's first term. The head of the Infokom department was eventually arrested shortly after the election and officially declared a suspect in a corruption case worth 1.9 billion rupiah. See 'Dua Pejabat di Maluku Masuk Bui', *Metro TV News.com*, 28 July 2008, <<http://202.158.49.22/berita.asp?id=63438>>, accessed 25 September 2008.

¹⁶ Author's interview with Hasbollah Toisuta, NGO activist and Islamic intellectual, 5 July 2008.

of widespread violence between religious groups was highly unlikely, some activists argued that there was still a possibility that especially young people who had been directly affected by the previous conflict could again fall prey to demagogues and provocateurs who, it was feared, might resurface in the run-up to the election. Indeed, religion and its potential for manipulation by political interests was an omnipresent factor in many political discussions in the months and weeks before the election. In order to help minimise the risk of renewed conflict, leaders from the different religious communities repeatedly issued joint statements, urging their followers not to be provoked by external forces.¹⁷

The Search for Candidates

The importance of religion in the run-up to the election became clear when the search for candidate pairs began in earnest. Although there were no legal requirements that prescribed gubernatorial candidates to take a running mate from across the religious divide, the history of the conflict and the resultant need to maintain balance between the faiths made it inconceivable that Christian candidates would not seek to ally themselves with Muslim running mates and vice-versa. In addition, of course, it can be argued that the pure logic of the electoral marketplace also necessitated the forming of cross-religious pairings, as only combined Christian/Muslim tickets would have a reasonable chance of appealing to voters from both communities.



Provincial Electoral Commission poster encouraging voter participation

¹⁷ See for example 'Berharap Masyarakat tak Diprovokasi', *Ambon Ekspres*, 30 June 2008; 'Tokoh Agama Lahirkan 7 Kesepakatan Pemilukada Damai', *Ambon Ekspres*, 4 July 2008.

In the end, the election was contested by four pairs of candidates, all of whom were promoted to the public through catchy acronyms (see Table 1). Even though legal requirements had been put in place by the national parliament to allow independent candidates to run, the provincial electoral commission decided that there was insufficient time to prepare for this so all four pairs were nominated by political parties or coalitions of parties. The negotiations that preceded the nominations reflected a highly familiar pattern of pragmatic opportunism and money politics that has been observed during numerous other local elections in Indonesia (Buehler 2007, Buehler and Tan 2007). When all the pairs were eventually finalised, two interesting trends were evident. First, the reputation of the Lease Islands as the dominant epicentre of power was reinforced by the fact that all four governor candidates hailed from this area, with two coming from the Henahetu and two from the Hatuhaha region. Second, as had been widely expected, all pairs featured cross-religious combinations. However, it was noteworthy that only one gubernatorial candidate was Christian.

Table 1: Candidates of the 2008 Maluku Pilkada (in order on ballot paper)

Names of Candidates	Acronym	Supporting Parties	Religious Background	Regional Background
Karel Ralahalu & Said Assagaff	RASA	PDI-P, PBR, PDK, PD, PPNUI, PKB, PKPI, PBB	Protestant & Muslim	Henahetu & Henahetu (family from outside Maluku)
Abdullah Tuasikal & Septinus Hematang	TULUS	PKS, PAN, PPD, PKPB	Muslim & Protestant	Hatuhaha & Western Southeast Maluku
Asis Samual & Lukas Uwuratuw	ASLI	PPP, PDS, Partai Pelopor	Muslim & Protestant	Henahetu & Western Southeast Maluku
Abdullah Latuconsina & Eduard Frans	MADU	Partai Golkar	Muslim & Protestant	Hatuhaha & Western Southeast Maluku

The first party to announce its candidate was PDI-P, which nominated the incumbent governor Karel Ralahalu. Overall, the party appeared remarkably solid in its support for the candidate, despite the controversy that had surrounded Ralahalu's rise to the party's provincial top job. If the selection of the gubernatorial candidate was more or less a foregone conclusion, the question of who would accompany him as candidate for deputy governor was more complicated. Four candidates were proposed to PDI-P's central board in Jakarta, all of them, unsurprisingly, Muslims. The four names included a

member of the powerful Tuasikal family from Haruku, but in the end Maluku's highest-ranking bureaucrat, provincial secretary Said Assagaff, was endorsed by the party bosses. A softly-spoken yet highly capable career bureaucrat with a long history of service in various provincial departments, Assagaff was widely regarded as a suitable candidate, but it may also be argued that Ralahalu and PDI-P may have had little choice but to nominate Assagaff, for at least two reasons. First, as the provincial secretary, Assagaff had immense knowledge about the real reasons for the various shortcomings and failures of Ralahalu's administration. He was believed to know important details about the distribution of funds from the Inpres 6 and had repeatedly shielded Ralahalu from deeper scrutiny by the provincial legislature over dubious political manoeuvres during *bupati* elections in a number of districts. Second, with family roots outside Maluku and a reputation as a capable but dull career bureaucrat, Assagaff did not put himself forward for the top job in 2013. For the PDI-P party elite, this was probably an important consideration. Well-aware that constitutional constraints meant that Ralahalu, in case of victory, would not be allowed to run for another term in 2013, PDI-P elites were keen to nominate a running mate who would be unlikely to abandon his boss before the next election, thus leaving the door open for a new PDI-P candidate to run for the top job in 2013.

Even if there had been no political circumstances making Assagaff's nomination almost inevitable, Ralahalu and PDI-P would most probably have chosen him. Looking at the backgrounds and personal characteristics of the two men, it is in fact almost uncanny how well they complement each other. Whereas Ralahalu fits the pattern of what Feith (1962) once called the 'solidarity makers', Assagaff is the archetypical 'administrator'. Religiously, Ralahalu is Christian while Assagaff is Muslim. And as far as ethno-regional backgrounds are concerned, Ralahalu is from Leihitu on Ambon Island, whereas Assagaff's most important identification marker is his Arab lineage which denotes him as an outsider or newcomer to Maluku, even though his family has long been resident in the region. While being regarded as an outsider may appear as a disadvantage at first sight, it was a strategic asset for Said Assagaff whose Arab descent and the fact that he is married to a woman from Sulawesi have helped him develop special bonds with some parts of Maluku's economically influential migrant community from Sulawesi (widely known as BBM – Buginese, Butonese, Makassarrese). Access to organisations within this community opened up important new resources that could be used to mobilise support for RASA's election campaign.¹⁸

In sum, Ralahalu and Assagaff had populist mass appeal and broad organisational support. The patronage networks of the two candidates extended to all the key players in Maluku, from political parties (primarily PDI-P) to the bureaucracy and the military to influential religious and *adat* organisations. Unsurprisingly then, a large number of smaller parties soon jumped on the bandwagon and joined PDI-P in declaring their support for the pair. In the end, a coalition of eight parties stood behind RASA, including a number of Islamic parties like PBB, PBR, PKB and PPNUI which hoped – and were

¹⁸ Just like local communities on the Lease Islands, the BBM community is also organised in various *paguyuban*, most prominently the so-called *Kerukunan Keluarga Sulawesi Selatan (KKSS)*, which has branches all over Maluku. And just like Ralahalu did with the *adat* organisations in Henahetu and Hahahutu, Assagaff too used the KKSS and other ethnically defined *adat* groups to mobilise support for RASA's election campaign.

hoped – to bring in some additional votes from the Islamic community. On paper these parties may have had little in common with Ralahalu and his main backer, the PDI-P, but in view of the incumbent's favorable public image and the potential windfall that was beckoning in case of re-election, they were all more than happy to become part of the RASA juggernaut.

The second candidate to announce his candidature was the incumbent deputy governor Mohammad Abdullah (Memet) Latuconsina, who was nominated by the Golkar Party. In contrast to Ralahalu, Latuconsina, who was also chair of Golkar's provincial leadership board at the time of the election, failed to secure support from any other party. What is even more interesting is that this apparent lack of faith also extended well into Golkar. Latuconsina's candidature was overshadowed by deep frictions within the party which had their roots in the circumstances under which Latuconsina had wrested the party chairmanship from his predecessor Abdullah Tuasikal in 2006.¹⁹ Under Tuasikal, Golkar had suffered various internal problems, many of which were related to his leadership style, his relations with the district branches of the party, and his refusal to live in Ambon City, which made communication difficult. The situation escalated in mid-2006 when Tuasikal suspended the chairman of Golkar's West Seram district branch. The suspension was rejected not only by the West Seram branch but also by all other district branches except the one in Central Maluku. Following the suspension, an exchange of allegations and counter-allegations between Tuasikal and a number of lower-level party cadres prompted the central leadership to eventually intervene and call for an extraordinary provincial party congress to end the turmoil.

At the time that these events unfolded within Golkar, Memet Latuconsina was still affiliated with PPP, the party that had nominated him for the deputy governor post in 2003. He quickly began lobbying the chairmen of Golkar's district branches and encouraged them to enquire with the central leadership board in Jakarta about the possibility of an extraordinary party congress (*Musyawarah Daerah Luar Biasa*, *Musdalub*). Initially reluctant to convene a *Musdalub* so shortly after the previous congress in 2005, the party leadership in Jakarta first asked Tuasikal to consolidate the ranks. To the irritation of both the district branches and the national party leadership, however, Tuasikal's interpretation of 'consolidation' was to simply suspend yet another district branch head, leading to further unrest amongst the third-tier cadres. Therefore, the central leadership eventually agreed to organise an extraordinary party congress. On hearing the news, Latuconsina immediately stepped down from his positions in PPP, claiming that he had actually been a Golkar member all along.²⁰ When the congress was finally held, securing the chairmanship was all but a formality.

However, the circumstances under which Latuconsina rose to power in Golkar left the party deeply divided. Despite being ousted from the provincial leadership board, Tuasikal retained substantial support in Golkar's wider patronage networks and in 2008 he took many of these supporters with him when he pursued his own gubernatorial candidature. Latuconsina, on the other hand, rather naively believed that bringing the

¹⁹ While this was the most obvious and most recent factional dispute in Golkar's Maluku branch, it should be noted that the origins of factionalism within Golkar in Maluku reach much further back in time and revolve around numerous dividing lines including place of origin and generational conflict.

²⁰ He pointed to his long career as a bureaucrat, arguing that as a civil servant during the New Order he had automatically been a member of Golkar.

district branch heads behind him and securing the provincial leadership would automatically earn him organisational support for his gubernatorial candidature. Yet, although he easily picked up the nomination for governor in a largely pre-arranged convention process, little support was forthcoming when the election drew closer,²¹ partly because many lower-ranking cadres defected to Tuasikal's camp,²² but also because even those who had initially supported Latuconsina had begun to doubt their candidate's leadership qualities. These doubts reached their peak when Latuconsina announced his choice for running mate shortly after his selection as gubernatorial candidate.

Latuconsina's choice for deputy governor was Brigade-General Eduard Frans, an intelligence officer who at the time of his nomination was still in active service for the national intelligence agency (*Badan Intelijen Nasional*, BIN). This selection violated an earlier agreement between Latuconsina and Edison Betaubun, a seasoned party politician and member of Golkar's central board in Jakarta who back at the Musdalub in 2006 had been agreed to become Latuconsina's running mate. Interestingly, Latuconsina's change of heart was widely regarded as understandable since Betaubun was believed to have little grassroots support in Maluku due to his long absence from the province. The problem, however, was that Betaubun's replacement had even less grassroots support. In fact, Eduard Frans was completely unknown to almost everyone in Maluku, including local journalists and, yet more bizarrely, many local Golkar politicians. According to journalists from Ambonese newspapers, members of Golkar's provincial leadership board were even unable to provide them with a curriculum vitae or a photo of the candidate.²³

Significantly, Latuconsina's decision to nominate Eduard Frans was not finalised in Ambon, but at a meeting between the two men in Jakarta. When Latuconsina returned to Ambon, he justified the nomination in front of his party colleagues and the local press with the simple statement that he wanted someone who could counter Ralahalu's military networks. He also argued that Frans would enhance his electoral prospects in Western Southeast Maluku because Frans hailed from this part of the province. Neither argument, however, was regarded as convincing by party insiders who felt that since Frans had spent most of his life outside Maluku, his electoral appeal was practically non-existent. Similarly, concerning the military links, many Golkar politicians expressed doubts that links to the military would bring any tangible advantages on election day. In fact, many were concerned that nominating an active intelligence officer would do more harm than good to the party's reputation. Pointing to past links between Golkar and the military and the party's efforts to distance itself from these links, a leading member of Golkar's organisational department for Maluku, for example, argued that Golkar as a professional and modern party should no longer seek to use the military to win elections. While he was cautious not to criticise the decision too directly, he made it clear that he and many of his party colleagues regarded Frans' appointment as a major mistake.²⁴

As a result, speculation was rife about the real reasons behind the move. Many conspiracy theories circulated in Ambon, mostly revolving around a possible return of

²¹ Like in other *pilkada*, Golkar held a convention to select its candidate. Voting rights at this convention were determined in a party document (*Juklak 5*) that gave provincial and district boards substantial powers. Since Latuconsina controlled Golkar's provincial board in Maluku and most district boards, he had little difficulty in securing the gubernatorial nomination.

²² 'Golkar Mulai Main Pecat', *Ambon Ekspres*, 28 June 2008.

²³ Author's personal communication with local journalists, 4 July 2008.

²⁴ Author's interview with Fatani Sohilaaw, Member of DPRD Maluku, Partai Golkar, 1 July 2008.

Abdullah Tuasikal to the Golkar leadership and an alleged move by the former party boss to convince the DPP in Jakarta to impose an unpopular candidate on Latuconsina in order to minimise his chances of winning the election.²⁵ It is, however, questionable whether Tuasikal really had so much influence on Yusuf Kalla and it is equally unclear why Kalla would want to agree to deliberately lose a local election.²⁶ Instead, it seems much more sensible to seek the blame for the strategic error of Frans' nomination in the antiquated political vision of Memet Latuconsina. As indicated above, the incumbent deputy governor moved from PPP to Golkar in the belief that the former regime party's organisational machinery would work for him. Numerous elections in recent years, however, have shown that Golkar's once notoriously effective party machine has lost much, if not all of its former prowess.²⁷ Similarly, Latuconsina's leadership style, described by the speaker of Maluku's provincial parliament as 'firm, resolute, almost authoritarian',²⁸ is reminiscent of old-style New Order politics. And last but not least, Latuconsina's official justification for choosing Frans also points to an old-fashioned commitment to military involvement in politics.²⁹ One may therefore argue that the nomination of Eduard Frans fits well into an overall pattern of Latuconsina as an old-style career bureaucrat who underwent his political socialisation in the New Order and who has been unable to adapt to the changing times in Indonesia.

In contrast to Latuconsina, his predecessor as Golkar leader, Abdullah Tuasikal is a colourful and rather controversial figure in the political establishment of Maluku. Significantly, he is also a true and long-serving Golkar cadre. Frequently described as a 'bulldozer' who will do whatever it takes to achieve his goals, he is said to maintain close contacts to local *preman* (thugs) groups and quite a few people suspect that he was not just a passive bystander during the conflict.³⁰ A political entrepreneur with a background in construction business, he entered Golkar via Indonesia's youth organisation KNPI

²⁵ This argument gained further support after Jusuf Kalla was reported as saying in late June that all local Golkar chairmen who nominated themselves as candidates in *pilkada* and then lost the election would be replaced. See 'Kalla Isyaratkan Copot 12 Ketua DPD', *Ambon Ekspres*, 30 June 2008.

²⁶ Proponents of this theory argued that Kalla wanted Golkar to be weakened ahead of the 2009 elections because of his own ambitions to run as vice-presidential candidate again. According to this logic, Kalla saw himself in a wider internal struggle with supporters of former party chairman Akbar Tandjung who were plotting to bring him down as chairman by pressuring him into accepting a nomination as presidential candidate. Since it is widely believed that Kalla would stand no chance of winning the presidency, his opponents in the party could then use his failure as a pretext for an extraordinary party congress in which they could reinstall Akbar Tandjung as party leader. Kalla's strategy to prevent this scenario, so the frequently-heard theory in Maluku, was to allow Golkar to be weakened in the regions (by losing regional elections). This would then give Kalla sufficient space to manoeuvre himself into another promising go at the vice-presidency – either with Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono or with Megawati Sukarnoputri – rather than a doomed attempt at the presidency.

²⁷ See Buehler (2007) for evidence from South Sulawesi or Tomsa (2006) for evidence from the 2004 presidential election.

²⁸ Author's interview with Richard Louhenapessy, 3 July 2008.

²⁹ Latuconsina also confirmed this attitude in an interview in which he expressed his belief that the people of Maluku needed a firm hand to guide them and that a running mate from the military, which in his view enjoyed a prestigious reputation in Maluku, would therefore be beneficial for his campaign. Author's interview with Abdullah Latuconsina, 1 July 2008.

³⁰ During the time of the conflict, he was leader of the Coordinating Board of Moluccan Muslims (*Badan Koordinasi Umat Islam Maluku*), an organisation with links to groups directly involved in the conflict (Noorhaidi 2005: 204).

(during the New Order closely affiliated with Golkar, but now independent). He served as legislator for Golkar in Maluku's provincial parliament and became *bupati* of the Central Maluku district in 2002 with the support of Golkar. Overall, his political achievements have been modest, and he did little to enhance his leadership credentials as *bupati* of Central Maluku. Nonetheless he was re-elected to a second term in the district's first *pilkada* in 2007, but many people believe that he would have lost that election had his strongest rival at the time, prominent local PDI-P figure John Mailoa, not died shortly before the poll.

After he lost the party's provincial top job to Latuconsina, Tuasikal at first remained a member of Golkar's Advisory Council, and in 2007 attempted to reclaim the chairmanship. His proposal to convene another Musdalub, however, was knocked back by the central leadership board. In the run-up to the *pilkada*, he again tried to reassert his authority in Golkar when he registered for the candidate nomination process. But on the day when all prospective candidates were supposed to present their vision and mission statements to the party Tuasikal stormed out of the room, calling the process a sham organised merely to endorse Latuconsina.³¹ He also vowed to resign from all his party positions and seek the nomination of another party. Following his departure from the Golkar race, he went on to try his luck with other parties. After a failed attempt to secure a nomination from a coalition of tiny parties called the United Maluku Coalition (*Koalisi Maluku Bersatu*, KMB), Tuasikal eventually approached the Islamist Prosperous Justice Party (*Partai Keadilan Sejahtera*, PKS), the third-strongest party in Maluku at the time of the *pilkada*. This manouvre left political observers somewhat bewildered because just a year before the *pilkada*, Tuasikal had exchanged insults with PKS leaders after he had accused the party of being radical and jihadist during the 2007 *bupati* election in Central Maluku. But all that now seemed forgotten, and despite the controversy Tuasikal eventually received the nomination from PKS,³² even though important parts of the provincial leadership board seemed to favour another candidate.³³ The party justified the selection by claiming, somewhat unconvincingly, that Tuasikal had promised to change,³⁴ but most observers believed that Tuasikal had simply bought his candidature by lobbying directly to PKS' central leadership board in Jakarta. Estimates of the money he offered for the nomination ranged from eight to twelve billion rupiah, which was apparently much more than other potential candidates were willing to pay.

Tuasikal's choice of running mate was Septinus Hematang, a public prosecutor from Western Southeast Maluku who had worked at the highest level of the Attorney-General's offices in Ambon and Jakarta. Initially, Hematang had intended to run for governor himself, but apparently he was unable to secure support from any party. While slightly more widely-known in Maluku than Eduard Frans, he too suffered from a serious lack of name recognition. While his career has been described as straightforward and untainted by scandal, many people questioned whether he would be able to contribute anything substantial to Tuasikal's electoral prospects.

³¹ Author's private communication with participants at the meeting, June/July 2008.

³² In addition, three small parties (PAN, PPD and PKPB) also joined PKS in supporting Tuasikal.

³³ Key figures in PKS were said to favour joining Golkar in supporting Memet Latuconsina, but apparently he was unwilling to fulfil the financial demands set by the party.

³⁴ Interview with Abdurrachman (member of PKS fraction in DPRD Maluku), 12 July 2008.

The fourth and final candidate to be announced was Asis Samual, a relatively little-known businessman from Liang (Ambon Island). Like Tuasikal, Samual owed his nomination primarily to his generous financial donations to the parties that nominated him and, at least in the case of PPP, to chaotic internal dynamics within the party. Indeed, at the time when other parties had already nominated their candidates, PPP was still deeply divided over the question of whether the party should actually nominate a governor candidate at all, or support the incumbent governor and attempt to push through a PPP-supported deputy governor candidate. Ultimately, a decision in favour of nominating a candidate for the top post was made, and on 26 March 2008, Asis Samual became the fourth and last candidate to join the race for the post of governor.³⁵ The eventual decision to nominate someone for the post of governor rather than just supporting a deputy governor candidate for Karel Ralahalu was justified by pointing to the importance of the looming 2009 legislative election. According to the chairman of PPP's Ambon branch, the PPP leadership board in Jakarta regarded it as essential that PPP was not seen as supporting a Christian candidate for governor in Maluku because it feared that PKS, its main rival in the upcoming legislative election, would later use the 2009 campaign to describe PPP as disloyal to Muslim interests.³⁶ Moreover, nominating someone for the post of governor was expected to yield greater financial benefits to the party than just offering a candidate for deputy governor. The problem for PPP, however, was that at the time it eventually decided to nominate a candidate for governor, there were hardly any serious contenders left. The three most ambitious candidates had already registered with other parties, leaving PPP with a number of less well-known contenders. Yet, since the overall priority was to nominate *someone*, the best (that is, the most generous) of the remaining lot had to be picked. And so, an alliance was formed between a party that did not care about its candidate and a candidate who did not care about his party.³⁷

Asis Samual was indeed a rather unusual choice, especially for PPP. A businessman and Golkar member by background, he spent much of his life in Bogor (West Java) and in Jakarta where he developed close bonds with the family of former president Suharto. Obviously proud of these bonds, Samual placed numerous advertisements in Maluku newspapers in the weeks before the nomination process, showing him in photos with Suharto's daughter Tutut and other New Order figures. Apart from this relationship with the Cendana family, however, very little is known about what exactly Asis Samual did during his time in Jakarta. The one thing that was abundantly clear to every Malukan though was that he had no political experience whatsoever. While this lack of experience was apparently irrelevant for PPP's central leadership board, some

³⁵ Interestingly, the decision to nominate Samual was not made in Maluku, but in Jakarta because the party's provincial leadership board had actually been suspended temporarily a few months earlier. 'Problems with internal party consolidation' had been the official reason for this extraordinary move, but what exactly that meant remained a matter of speculation. Part of the problem was certainly the somewhat un-Islamic lifestyle of PPP's previous leader, who was dogged by rumours of gambling and extramarital affairs, but that would not explain why the entire provincial board needed to be suspended.

³⁶ Author's interview with Afras Pattisahusiwa, 14 July 2008.

³⁷ According to Afras Pattisahusiwa, PPP's campaign manager, Samual made it clear immediately after his nomination that he did not intend to involve the party in his campaign in any way. The candidate himself could not be reached to verify this statement. Author's interview with Afras Pattisahusiwa, 14 July 2008.

local PPP politicians from Maluku were outraged that ‘the party did not only not nominate the best candidate, but actually the very worst’.³⁸

Samual’s running mate was Lukas Uwuratuw, a man widely known as the ‘oil king’ (*raja minyak*) in his native Western Southeast Maluku due to his business activities in the petroleum industry. Outside Western Southeast Maluku, however, Uwuratuw was, like Frans and Hematang, a largely unknown quantity. And even in the area from which he hailed, Uwuratuw was anything but universally popular after he was implicated in a number of corruption scandals during his time as deputy district head from 2002-2007.³⁹ In fact, despite his success as an entrepreneur, an aura of continuous political failure surrounds this long-standing Golkar cadre. In 2007, for example, he vainly attempted to climb up the governmental ladder to become district head in Western Southeast Maluku. Undeterred, he then made overtures to Memet Latuconsina for nomination as candidate for deputy governor in the 2008 Maluku *pilkada*. But despite sharing the same party affiliation with Latuconsina, these efforts were also to no avail. In the end, he seemed desperate to join the race with anybody who was willing to accept him, so he eagerly seized the chance to team up with Samual when PPP eventually decided to nominate its own candidate.

All in all, the candidate selection processes revealed a number of important insights into Maluku’s local politics. First, religion was an omnipresent though not always openly expressed concern during the selection of candidates, thus imposing an important structural constraint on all actors. In a political environment where balance between Christians and Muslims was perceived to be paramount, all four candidates had no choice but to choose running mates from ‘the other’ religion, whether they liked it or not. Yet, despite the promotion of all candidates as cross-religious pairs, it was primarily the governor candidates (rather than their running mates) who were publicly recognised. Accordingly, many locals saw the election essentially as a contest between one Christian candidate and three Muslim candidates. Second was the importance of ethnicity, or to be more precise, the candidates’ places of origin. As mentioned before, politics in Maluku has long been dominated by a small group of powerful families from the Lease Islands (Ambon Island, Haruku, Saparua and Nusalaut) in Central Maluku. It was therefore not surprising that all four governor candidates were indeed from either Ambon Island or Haruku. In contrast to previous years, however, when the power struggle had taken place behind firmly closed doors, this first-ever *pilkada* forced the candidates to look for running mates who promised to be able to mobilise broader support in areas outside the Lease Islands. For three out of four candidates, this imperative resulted in the selection of a running mate from Maluku’s second-most populous region, Western Southeast Maluku. Only Karel Ralahalu opted for a different approach. Banking on his own popularity in the remoter parts of the province, he focused on securing the vote from the influential group of BBM migrants rather than desperately trying to find a candidate for deputy governor from Western Southeast Maluku.

³⁸ Author’s interview with Yusran Laetapa, member of PPP, 29 June 2008.

³⁹ The most prominent of the various corruption cases that implicated Uwuratuw concerned the purchase of speed boats for the district government of Western Southeast Maluku. Despite strong indications of involvement, however, Uwuratuw was never sentenced for corruption. See for example ‘Presiden Diminta Izinkan Pemeriksaan Wakil Bupati MTB’, *Suara Pembaruan*, 14 June 2005.

Party affiliation and money politics also played interesting roles in the selection of the candidates. But in contrast to the role of religion and birthplace, which were in many respects peculiar to the Maluku context, the dynamics that could be observed in regards to the role of political parties and money politics were little different from those in other Indonesian provinces. As elsewhere, for example, huge amounts of money had to be generated by the candidates in order to seal their nominations from the parties which were determined to make the most of their gatekeeping position by effectively auctioning off the right to be nominated to the highest bidder. By contrast, loyalty to a party and its alleged values played little to no role at all in most cases. In view of this phenomenon it was hardly surprising that most parties in Maluku (again, as in other provinces and districts) split over the nomination process as individual members and supporters often felt that their interests were better accommodated by a particular candidate that was nominated by another party. Defections and shifting loyalties were commonplace in the run-up to the election, especially in Golkar, PPP, PAN and PKS. In fact, only PDI-P seemed to defy this trend. Despite ramblings of dissatisfaction amongst some of the party's longest serving local cadres the party appeared remarkably solid in support of its candidate and as the election would soon demonstrate, this solidity was by no means insignificant.

The Campaign

The time between the announcements of the teams and the beginning of the official election campaign was characterised by the candidates' frenzied efforts to assemble effective campaign teams (so-called *Tim Sukses*). Incumbent governor Karel Ralahu had a distinct advantage in this race for financial and material support not only because he possessed more comprehensive and better institutionalised patronage networks than his three challengers, but also because he was the first contender to be officially confirmed as a candidate. While the other potential candidates were still busy outbidding each other in their quest for an organisational vehicle, Ralahu had long secured his nomination from PDI-P and was already actively involved in courting key stakeholders from his various political, religious and economic networks.

By the time the campaign eventually got under way, the results of this uneven distribution of resources were clearly visible on the streets of Maluku. In Ambon City, for example, thousands of RASA posters and stickers adorned the urban landscape. Beyond the capital, countless red shelters manned by members of the campaign team (so-called *posko* or coordination posts) sprang up even in the remotest villages, regardless of whether they were Christian or Muslim. Before long, the confidently smiling faces of Ralahu and Assagaff were omnipresent. Of the other three contenders, only Abdullah Tuasikal seemed reasonably determined to take on the incumbent in this poster war, especially in his home district of Central Maluku where he set up a large number of his own *posko* to make his presence felt.⁴⁰ But compared to the RASA onslaught, even Tuasikal's efforts looked rather pathetic. At the same time, promotion material for

⁴⁰ Many of the TULUS posters had a yellow background. This was widely interpreted as an attempt by Tuasikal to woo traditional Golkar voters whose voting behaviour might still be strongly influenced by political symbols such as the colours used by political parties in Indonesia.

MADU and ASLI was so scarce that some locals tended to believe that this election was not contested by four but by two candidates.

Overall, in fact, the campaign was a rather muted affair. Despite the posters and the daily coverage in the newspapers, one could easily forget that an election was imminent, as many campaign events fell victim to logistical problems caused by the archipelagic geography of Maluku and atrocious weather conditions throughout the campaign period. The *pilkada* was scheduled in the middle of the rainy season and throughout the campaign daily downpours caused flooding and the collapse of bridges, while inter-island traffic was often disrupted as ferries could not operate as scheduled. One of the positive side effects of the subdued atmosphere, however, was that fears of a reemergence of hostilities between segments of the different religious and ethnic communities did not eventuate.



The sight of children clad in the candidates' colours was commonplace during the campaign

If the poor weather conditions helped to keep tempers in check, an arguably more important factor in explaining the lack of excitement on the streets of Maluku in the run-up to the poll was the fact that both the candidates themselves as well as public figures

from religious groups and other non-governmental organisations were actively involved in urging their supporters to refrain from stirring up emotions. NGOs, for example, conducted conflict resolution workshops and other activities intended to help maintain a calm atmosphere. Similarly, the leaders of the biggest religious organisations including GPM and its Islamic counterpart, the Indonesian Ulema Council (*Majelis Ulema Indonesia, MUI*), issued a number of joint statements, calling for a peaceful election. They even produced a video clip together, which was frequently screened on a local television station. The clip, which featured appearances by MUI leader Idrus Toekan, GPM chairman John Ruhlessin and other religious dignities, urged Malukans not to be provoked by anyone who might want to stir up violence. Last but not least, the candidates themselves tried, for most of the campaign, to project a public image of mutual respect. Although some incidents of intimidation and 'black' campaigning were reported in the media,⁴¹ the general mood between the contenders at times seemed almost amicable. This was epitomised in a public debate between the candidates that was broadcasted live on TVRI Maluku a few days before the election. Largely void of political content, the debate was laden with platitudes, prompting one observer to liken the event to the popular reality show *Indonesian Idol* rather than a political debate.⁴²



**Thousands braved the rain to attend RASA's final campaign rally
in Ambon on 5 July 2008**

It was only in the last two days of the campaign that it finally came to life at least in the city of Ambon where all four candidate pairs were scheduled to hold large rallies.

⁴¹ See for example 'Tim Rasa Selidiki Keterlibatan PNS Malteng Dalam Pilkada', *Suara Maluku*, 28 June 2008; 'Pengawasan Lemah, Banyak PNS Terlibat Tisu', *Ambon Ekspres*, 30 June 2008; '20 PNS Terlibat Tisu Dilaporkan ke Panwas', *Ambon Ekspres*, 4 July 2008; 'Tim TULUS Lapor RASA ke Panwas', *Mimbar Maluku*, 5 July 2008.

⁴² 'Thamrin Ely: Maluku Idol Dapat Nilai 7', *Suara Maluku*, 2 July 2008.

A common feature of any election in Indonesia, these rallies usually reveal relatively little about the real levels of support for a candidate, but in this particular *pilkada* they were actually a remarkably accurate reflection of the popularity of the individual contenders. Whilst MADU and ASLI struggled to fill at least half of the local football field, TULUS attracted a fairly decent crowd of mostly young men who used the opportunity to fill the normally quiet streets of Ambon with the noise of roaring motorcycles and honking horns. By far the biggest number of people, however, turned up to the rally held by RASA.⁴³ Braving incessant rain and knee-deep puddles on the half-flooded pitch, thousands turned up to see Ralahu and his main guest speaker, PDI-P chairwoman Megawati Sukarnoputri. In many ways, this rally demonstrated once more why Karel Ralahu was about to enter election day as the red hot favourite. Perhaps most significantly, the incumbent governor was the only candidate who actually succeeded in transforming his rally into what it was intended to be, namely a colourful show of force. While the other three candidates had difficulties in mobilising sizeable crowds, the RASA rally did live up to its promise of turning the football field into a sea of red.



Youth attending RASA's campaign in Ambon, 5 July 2008

Ralahu could probably have achieved this success even without luring a star attraction of Megawati's calibre to Ambon. Well-attended rallies in smaller towns and

⁴³ 'Massa Rasa Penuhi Pusat Kota, Massa Kandidat Lain Seimbang', *Suara Maluku*, 7 July 2008.

villages indicated that Ralahalu himself was a major drawcard for the masses. However, Megawati's visit was a personal coup for the governor, which sent a powerful message to the thousands of people who had turned up on the football field that morning. The first part of this message was that PDI-P was a party that really cared about Maluku and its people. Secondly, and probably equally important, Megawati's presence in Ambon that day seemed to indicate that Karel Ralahalu was so influential in PDI-P circles that his voice was actually heard at the highest level of the party hierarchy in Jakarta. In a province like Maluku which had felt neglected by Jakarta for decades this was a factor that was not to be underestimated.

The Election and the Result

On 5 July the campaign period drew to a close and after a three-day lull period the election was finally held on 9 July 2008. In an unexpected twist, the sun decided to shine brightly from the Maluku sky in the early hours of the morning, thereby providing the perfect setting for the historic event that was about to unfold. Perhaps buoyed by the good weather, Malukans came out in force to mark the occasion. Initial estimates had voter turnout at 85 percent. Even though this figure was later downgraded slightly, there can be little doubt that electoral participation in this *pilkada* was remarkably high.

When the polling institute *Lingkaran Survei Indonesia* (LSI) gathered the local media to announce the results of its quick count in the afternoon of 9 July, few observers expected any major surprises. And yet, even though the winner seemed a foregone conclusion, the clarity of the result did come as a surprise to many. According to the quick count, Ralahalu had won a massive 61.81 percent of the vote, with Abdullah Tuasikal trailing a distant second with 26.04 percent. The other two candidates only reached single-digit figures. Two weeks later, the election commission confirmed Ralahalu's landslide victory with only minor adjustments to the LSI figures. The official end result looked as follows:

Table 2: Final Result of the 2008 *Pilkada* in Maluku

Candidate	Number of votes (absolute)	Number of votes (percent)
Ralahalu-Assagaff (RASA)	452,711	62.14
Tuasikal-Hematang (TULUS)	192,112	26.37
Latuconsina-Frans (MADU)	44,700	6.14
Samual-Uwuratuw (ASLI)	38,998	5.35

Source: 'Ralahalu-Assagaff Pemenang Pilkada Maluku', *Kompas.com*, 24 July 2008, available at <<http://www.kompas.com/read/xml/2008/07/24/12311310/ralahalu-assagaff.pemenang.pilkada.maluku>>, accessed 4 October 2008.

The impressive figures were evidence that Ralahalu's electoral strategy had been planned and executed to near perfection. There can indeed be little doubt that at the time of the election Ralahalu was a very popular leader. By restoring a sense of security, he had successfully addressed the province's most pressing problem of the last five years and fulfilled the most urgent desire of the vast majority of the people. Perhaps equally important though, he not only delivered this most basic of needs, but he also proved highly adept at selling this success during his image-building campaign.

Table 3: Distribution of Votes along Demographic Indicators

	Ralahalu-Assagaff (RASA)	Tuasikal-Hematang (TULUS)	Latuconsina-Frans (MADU)	Samual-Uwuratuw (ASLI)
Age				
19 or under	40.9%	45.5%	9.1%	4.5%
20-29	51.6%	37.6%	3.2%	7.5%
30-39	59.8%	28.4%	2.0%	9.8%
40-49	64.3%	24.3%	8.6%	2.9%
50 and above	63.8%	27.5%	5.8%	2.9%
Income				
Less than 400,000 Rp p.m.	60.9%	32.3%	3.2%	3.6%
400,000 – 999,999 Rp p.m	53.5%	31.0%	2.8%	12.7%
1 Million or more	57.4%	24.1%	13.0%	5.6%
District				
Ambon	73.94%	16.24%	6.41%	3.41%
Buru	63.69%	26.22%	4.68%	5.41%
Aru and Western Southeast Maluku	69.30%	22.93%	3.55%	4.23%
Central Maluku and East Seram	50.49%	38.38%	4.84%	6.28%
Western Southeast Maluku	55.70%	9.65%	11.34%	23.32%
West Seram	65.08%	23.14%	9.14%	2.64%
Sex				
Male	57.8%	30.6%	4.4%	7.2%
Female	58.5%	31.3%	5.1%	5.1%
Urban/Rural				
Urban	63.7%	22.5%	6.9%	6.9%
Rural	55.9%	34.3%	3.9%	5.9%

Adapted from LSI (2008)

This campaign took Ralahalu to some of the remotest places in the province, including islands that had never been visited by a provincial government official before. It was in these places in particular that Ralahalu easily secured mass support by presenting himself as a benevolent leader who took a genuine interest in the fate of his constituents. In the run-up to the election, the governor and his campaign team masterfully exploited this image as they highlighted Ralahalu's proximity to the people and his experience as a proven leader.⁴⁴

How broad and widespread his appeal indeed was by the time of the election could be seen when the pollsters from LSI released their data on the distribution of votes along selected demographic indicators. As shown in Table 3, Ralahalu and his running mate Said Assagaff not only received the majority of votes from people of (nearly) all age and income groups, but also from all districts and municipalities. Similarly, RASA secured almost equally overwhelming support from both men and women and from people living in both urban and rural areas. But popularity alone does not account for these impressive figures. On the contrary, Ralahalu's immense support from key organisational stakeholders including political parties, religious and ethno-regional organisations as well as economic interest groups was perhaps even more important. Support from these groups was established through complex patron-client relations and unlike in Java, where the impact of patron-clientelism on voting behaviour seems to be in decline,⁴⁵ the prevalence of such clientelistic structures continues to play a huge role in determining electoral choices in Eastern Indonesia, including Maluku. The significance of patronage and its utilisation through communal organisations in Indonesia's outer islands has been highlighted by van Klinken (2007, 2009), who has observed that '[t]he most striking feature of provincial town life is [...] vigorous organisational life, which combines themes of "traditional" family-like ethnic or religious community with modern techniques of mobilisation and a great interest in capturing the institutions of the state' (van Klinken 2009). As the biggest Indonesian town east of Makassar, Ambon is certainly no exception to this phenomenon and after five years at the top of the government, Karel Ralahalu was no doubt highly conscious of the importance of the plethora of political, economic, religious and ethnic organisations that operate in and around Ambon. In order to take full advantage of their existence – and their potential to mobilise voters – Ralahalu showed little hesitation to play the incumbency card.

Acutely aware that accommodating the interests of key stakeholders would require the generous distribution of patronage, the governor had always laid great emphasis on the development of close linkages with a number of influential non-governmental organisations. In fact, one may argue that this clientelistic dimension of Ralahalu's leadership style had been evident since the very early days in 2003,⁴⁶ but it

⁴⁴ One of the campaign slogans of RASA was 'Bukan Janji, Tapi Bukti' (Not [just] Promises, but Proof), which directly referred to Ralahalu's track record as governor.

⁴⁵ Several studies on recent Indonesian elections have shown that while patron-clientelism may persist in Java as well, voting behaviour on Indonesia's most populous island seems more determined by the two axial trends of enduring *aliran* structures on the one hand and increasingly rational decision-making amongst voters on the other hand (Aspinall 2005, Ufen 2008).

⁴⁶ On taking up the post of governor in 2003, he appointed a number of close confidants to important positions in the bureaucracy, despite questions about their qualifications. Favouritism was also alleged in

seems that it was only after his shrewdly orchestrated rise to the provincial PDI-P chairmanship that he actually embarked on a systematic campaign to build ever-wider patronage networks. The most important pillars of this emerging web of pro-Ralahalu groups were a number of political parties (chiefly PDI-P, but also some smaller parties), the Protestant Church and many of the *adat*-inspired *paguyuban* from Ambon Island and Central Maluku. With the backing of these crucial powerbrokers, the incumbent could be reasonably well-assured that the image he had built over the years would be incessantly reinforced at the grassroots through countless speeches and sermons given at party meetings, church services and community gatherings.

The effort to get these groups on board paid off handsomely on the day of the election. In a rare show of party solidity, for example, PDI-P mobilised nearly its entire pool of members and supporters to vote almost unanimously for Ralahalu.⁴⁷ One of Ralahalu's key campaign strategists, provincial party secretary Lucky Wattimury, later singled out the great work of the party's campaign team as one of the main reasons as to why Ralahalu could achieve such an extraordinary result.⁴⁸ Furthermore, the GPM connection also proved crucial. No less than 83 percent of all Christians in Maluku voted for Ralahalu (LSI 2008), confirming the impression that many voters perceived the election primarily as a contest between one Christian and three Muslim candidates. Significantly, the GPM was widely believed to have played a highly strategic role in creating and continuously reinforcing this perception through its far-reaching network of churches at the grassroots. And even though GPM leader John Ruhulestin insisted that there were no formal instructions for GPM members to vote for Ralahalu, he also noted that such an instruction would not have been necessary anyway. 'They do not need instructions, they already know whom they should vote for', he said with a broad grin,⁴⁹ indicating that the traditional bond between GPM and PDI-P (and by implication, Ralahalu) was still very much intact. The third pillar of Ralahalu's organisational support base comprised the increasingly influential *adat* groups, especially those from Ralahalu's home turf in Ambon Island. Though their direct influence on voting behaviour is difficult to quantify, anecdotal evidence suggests that encouragement and subtle pressure from these *adat* leaders did occur in the run-up to the election and that these measures helped Ralahalu secure the extraordinary average of more than 80 percent of the votes in areas like Ambon Island and Saparua (LSI 2008).

In sum, it was a combination of Ralahalu's genuine popularity, his clever exploitation of this popularity, and his astute instrumentalisation of powerful patronage networks that mainly accounted for the incumbent's re-election. In addition, one may argue that Ralahalu also benefited from the sometimes dilettantish tactical manoeuvres of his political opponents, particularly during the nomination process and the search for running mates. In the end, it was clear that none of the other three contenders possessed either the popular appeal or the organisational support to pose a serious challenge to the incumbent so that even many Muslim voters saw no real alternative to Karel Ralahalu.

Ralahalu's handling of the distribution of reconstruction funds from Inpres 6, even though it should be stressed here that no evidence is available to prove this.

⁴⁷ According to the quick count results, 96.7% of PDI-P supporters voted for Ralahalu.

⁴⁸ Author's interview with Lucky Wattimury, speaker of the municipal parliament in Ambon, and leader of Ralahalu's campaign team, 16 July 2008.

⁴⁹ Author's interview with John Ruhulestin, Chairman of GPM, 4 July 2008.

The Road Ahead

Karel Ralahalu won Maluku's first-ever direct gubernatorial election by a huge margin. He was sworn in by Indonesia's Minister for Home Affairs Mardiyanto on 15 September 2008,⁵⁰ endowed with an unprecedented mandate to shape the future trajectory of the province in accordance with his ideas. It remains fairly unclear at this stage what exactly these ideas are since the campaign was, rather unsurprisingly, more or less void of specific policy proposals. What is clear, however, is that there is no shortage of challenges waiting for Ralahalu.

Perhaps most importantly, the old and new governor will have to take the next step of moving Maluku further away from the possibility of a re-emergence of communal conflict. In his first term in office he has performed reasonably well in regards to the physical reconstruction of the province, but many observers have bemoaned the governor's lacklustre support for meaningful reconciliation between the religious communities. Even though Ralahalu managed to get 38 percent of the Muslim vote in the election, his support base is still dominated primarily by Christians. Arguably, this provides fertile ground for continuous resentment along religious lines. Overcoming this simmering resentment will therefore be one of the most difficult tasks for Ralahalu in his second term. Whether he will succeed in fulfilling this task will ultimately depend on a number of factors. There can be little doubt, for example, that he will have to revive the economy in order to lower unemployment rates and lift the living standards of ordinary people. He will also need to address urgent social issues such as refugee repatriation, housing and education,⁵¹ and possibly provide more funds for grassroots projects that promote reconciliation and mutual understanding between the various religious and ethnic communities.

Furthermore, Ralahalu's chances of success in his second term in office are likely to depend on how he will position himself vis-à-vis the Muslim candidates that lost the election, especially Abdullah Tuasikal and Memet Latuconsina. As members of traditionally powerful family clans, both are expected to retain a keen interest in the distribution of political and economic power in Maluku. Most probably, however, they and their families will soon find themselves excluded from the most lucrative projects and positions. Given his overwhelming election victory, Ralahalu is widely expected to primarily favour his followers from Henahetu at the expense of the old Hatuhaha elites. Arguably, this is where one of the biggest dangers for Maluku lurks. To completely relegate the once immensely powerful Hatuhaha elites to the fringes of provincial politics has a strong potential to open a Pandora's Box of renewed communal conflict because it might lead to a dangerous fusion of religious and ethno-regional grievances. Moreover, it could once again bring together people from different segments of Maluku's socio-economic strata and create an explosive cocktail of ordinary people who, for one reason or another, might feel disadvantaged by the government and demagogic elites who may

⁵⁰ 'Mendagri Lantik Karel Ralahalu Jadi Gubernur Maluku', *Kompas.com*, 15 September 2008, <<http://www.kompas.com/read/xml/2008/09/15/14142014/mendagri.lantik.karel.ralahalu.jadi.gubernur.maluku>>, accessed 30 September 2008.

⁵¹ To provide free education to the poor was one of Ralahalu's election promises. After the election, new deputy governor Said Assagaff stated that the government would craft the relevant regulations to implement this policy within the first 100 days in office. See 'Konsep Pendidikan Gratis Disiapkan Dalam 100 Hari Kerja', *Ambon Ekspres*, 22 September 2008.

be looking for an opportunity to avenge perceived losses in the political sphere by playing politics by other means. In order to avoid this scenario, the new Ralahalu administration may be well-advised to somehow accommodate the interests of the losing candidates, if only at the most basic level.

Another challenge for Ralahalu in his second term will be his handling of the broad coalition of parties and non-government organisations that supported his re-election. While ongoing support appears fairly secure from the Protestant Church and the various *adat* groups the governor himself sometimes actively helped create, the backing from the various political parties that supported him in July 2008 will be more difficult to sustain. In this context it is worth reiterating that no less than eight parties had joined the RASA bandwagon before the *pilkada* and there can be no doubt that all of these parties expect to be rewarded for their loyalty, either through representation in the top layers of the provincial bureaucracy or through lucrative business contracts for members of their clientelistic networks. This could pose a real challenge for Ralahalu, for two reasons. First, he may put his reputation as a clean leader on the line if he grants too many concessions and contracts purely on the basis of personal or political considerations. Second, the huge number of parties in his coalition could make it difficult to distribute the available patronage resources evenly and fairly. Sooner or later, certain parties are likely to feel outdone by others, which will then probably lead to defections from the coalition.

The extent to which this will eventually affect Ralahalu's performance in office will only become clear some time after the 2009 legislative election. It is, for instance, not entirely inconceivable that after the upcoming legislative election some of the parties that in 2008 supported Ralahalu in order to get a share of the spoils will no longer have seats in parliament. Should this kind of political constellation occur, there would be a strong incentive for Ralahalu to stop providing favours to these parties because he would no longer have to fear retribution from them in parliament. Similarly, if his own party PDI-P can build upon the momentum from the *pilkada* and improve on the rather disappointing 2004 result,⁵² Ralahalu may also find himself in a position where he can more easily disregard the requests from the smaller parties that supported his re-election bid in July 2008.

Ultimately then, the redistribution of power in Maluku will only be complete after the 2009 election. Only after the composition of parliament is decided will Karel Ralahalu know exactly what political forces he will have to engage with on a daily basis. But regardless of the results of the upcoming election, the *pilkada* of July 2008 has certainly set a significant benchmark for the future trajectory of post-conflict politics in Maluku. Not only did it proceed peacefully and without any major disturbances, but it also provided evidence that democratic institutions are now widely accepted as the only legitimate rules that determine the distribution of power. That is a small, but not an insignificant step in the right direction.

⁵² In 2004, PDI-P reached 18.5 percent in Maluku, a massive loss compared to 1999. In the provincial parliament the party holds ten out of forty-five seats and represents the second-biggest fraction after Golkar in the 2004-2009 period.

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